DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 087 JC 910 377

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TITLE Institutional Effectiveness: A Strategy for Institutional Renewal.
INSTITUTION Midlands Technical Coll., Columbia, SC.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 13p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; Accreditation (Institutions); *College Planning; Community Colleges; Educational Legislation; Evaluation Criteria; *Organizational Effectiveness; Outcomes of Education; Role of Education; *Self Evaluation (Groups); Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Efforts to assess institutional effectiveness not only enable community colleges to meet accreditation mandates, but can also serve as a catalyst for institutional renewal. Institutional effectiveness has become an important topic for the 1990s as a result of past neglect of accountability, new legislative mandates for education, changes in accreditation criteria from process-oriented to outcomes-oriented, and a renewed interest on the part of colleges in improving the quality of instruction. To assess institutional effectiveness a college must define the mission of the college; articulate the major results that are expected from the achievement of the mission; and determine the specific evidence that will be acceptable to determine whether those results have been achieved. At a minimum, institutional assessment processes will require that institutions: (1) articulate their mission; (2) establish a planning mechanism; (3) develop an evaluation system; (4) identify critical areas of success; (5) establish priority standards upon which the college can judge its effectiveness; (6) determine mechanisms for documenting if the established standards have been met; and (7) utilize the results of assessment for decision making. In addition, colleges must enlist the support of the president and board of trustees, involve all units of the college, and determine how to pay for assessment. Indicators of effectiveness might include transfer student success, job placement rates of graduates, employer satisfaction, and economic impact of the institution. Institutions should publicly recognize individuals and departments that make significant contributions toward achievement of the college's mission. (PAA)

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INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: A STRATEGY FOR INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

Emphasis on accountability and effectiveness offers a perfect opportunity for community colleges to gain much deserved regard from their communities and constituents. For too long community colleges have been judged by university standards. In the October 15, 1990 U.S. News and World Report list of America's best colleges, community colleges were conspicuously absent. Several authors in the past decade judged community colleges' effectiveness by university standards or by very narrow criteria related to the transfer function. The problem is not that the standards are too high - they are often not the appropriate standards. Most effectiveness and accountability systems measure the degree to which an organization is successful in carrying out its stated purpose. Community colleges have a unique mission and should be measured by standards relevant to their mission. The leadership of community colleges must seize the institutional effectiveness initiative as an opportunity to shape an agenda that demonstrates the success of the "people's college" in achieving its mission.

Institutional effectiveness processes not only enables two-year colleges to meet the minimum standards of accreditation and state mandates, they can become a catalyst for institutional renewal. Three basic questions about institutional effectiveness will be addressed in this paper.

1. Why has institutional effectiveness become a central agenda item for higher education in the 1990s?
2. What is the meaning and application of effectiveness to the community college?
3. How does a college initiate a workable program of institutional effectiveness?

The WHY of Institutional Effectiveness

Past neglect of accountability is one obvious reason why institutional effectiveness has become the hottest new topic on the educational agenda. Colleges have tended to say to their constituents and to their funding agencies -- "Trust us. What we do cannot be measured." -- or -- "Our work is beyond your comprehension." Evidence is mounting that such tactics are no longer acceptable.

In the 1990s, educators must step up to the line and become more accountable for the almost 400 billion dollars spent annually on education in America.

In December 1989, B. Franklin Skinner, President of the Southern Bell Corporation, addressed a general session of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools on the topic "Two Cheers for Higher Education."[1] He withheld the third cheer because, in his opinion, higher education has failed to keep its mission in clear focus. He used this quote from Peter Drucker to make his point, "The present level of rigor and narrow focus of undergraduate education is not preparing graduates to help business compete in the international marketplace."

Skinner shared a story about Lawrence of Arabia to make his point. The Arabian leader took several Arab chieftains to peace talks in Paris. They were awed by the modern wonders they had never seen before, especially the brass faucets in their hotel rooms. These men of the desert were fascinated that water could be made to flow by a flick of the wrist. When they returned to the Middle East, one of the men had removed a faucet and brought it along fully expecting that water would flow out of it in the Arabian desert.

In the past, business and legislative leaders have been in such awe of higher education's golden domes and ivy covered walls (our brass faucets) that they have been reticent to critique the effectiveness of our services and

programs. However, in 1990, we face a new day. According to Mr. Skinner, those who pay the bill are vitally interested in what comes out of the faucet.

Political initiatives are another reason for the focus on effectiveness. Because higher education, in large measure, has elected not to be accountable, legislatures in most states have initiated accountability mandates. According to Ted Marchese, Vice President of the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), only five states had accountability mandates in 1985. In 1990, forty states had such mandates and several of the remaining ten have accountability measures under consideration.

The change in regional accreditation criteria is the most practical reason for the new attention to institutional effectiveness. When the North Central Accrediting Association revised its standards in February 1990 to include institutional effectiveness measures, it was the last of the six regional accrediting bodies to demonstrate a commitment to outcomes oriented accreditation. The Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) which accreditates southern community colleges has been the vanguard leader in the educational reform movement. In 1984 SACS moved from process- to outcomes-oriented accreditation. Process-oriented accreditation measures quality in terms of enrollment, volumes in the library and credential of faculty, which may or may not have anything to do with the quality of the educational experience. Outcomes-oriented accreditation measures quality in terms of student learning and success and addresses the question "What impact has the college had upon the individual student or the community it serves?" Ready or not, community colleges must deal with institutional effectiveness as they seek to reaffirm their accreditation.

In addition to the reasons outlined above, institutional effectiveness has been embraced by many colleges because it improves the quality of teaching and

learning and provides an opportunity to communicate past and present effectiveness. Institutions who have made a college-wide commitment to institutional effectiveness are willing to ask tough questions about how much their students are learning. When colleges focus on the content and the outcome of courses and programs, the teaching and learning process is enhanced. Further, many community colleges have learned that an outcomes-oriented evaluation process produces data that demonstrate a high degree of satisfaction with college programs and services.

Peter T. Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management in his book, Assessing Institutional Effectiveness, observes "The underlying goal of any organization is to improve effectiveness."[2] The national emphasis on accountability provides the paradigm in which this goal of the community college can be realized.

The WHAT of Institutional Effectiveness

The definitions of institutional effectiveness range from the simple to the complex. Some argue that institutional effectiveness is just a new way of looking at planning and evaluation -- "old wine in new wine skins." Historically, colleges have had offices of planning and offices of institutional research. However, too often planning has not been driven by a serious in-depth evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the college; nor have the results of institutional research been used to measure the effectiveness of planning. The Commission on Colleges (SACS) Criteria says, "Institutions have an obligation to all constituents to evaluate effectiveness and to use the results in a broad base continuous planning and evaluation process."[3]

Peter Ewell, who assisted the Commission on Colleges in the development of its Criteria, defines "Institutional effectiveness as the comparison of the

results achieved to the goals intended."[4] The SACS Criteria concludes that institutional effectiveness is matching performance to purpose. The second "must" statement in Section III of the Criteria reads "All institutions must define their expected educational results and describe how the achievement of these results will be ascertained."

Perhaps the most thorough definition of effectiveness has been provided by the National Alliance of Community and Technical Colleges -- "Institutional effectiveness is the process of articulating the mission of the college, setting goals, defining how the college and community will know when these goals are being met and using the data from assessment in an on-going cycle of planning and evaluation."[5] The Council on Post-Secondary Accreditation makes the following statement about institutional effectiveness, "The quality of an educational process is related to (1) the appropriateness of its objectives; (2) the effectiveness of the use of resources in pursuing these objectives; and (3) the degree to which these objectives are achieved. Without a clear statement of what education is expected to provide, it is not possible to determine how good it is."[6]

A review of these definitions and observations about institutional effectiveness suggests that while the accountability movement incorporates many of the established educational processes and academic departments of colleges, it involves a new commitment at the governing board and executive administration level to assure that college programs and resources are more effectively used to achieve the institution's purpose.

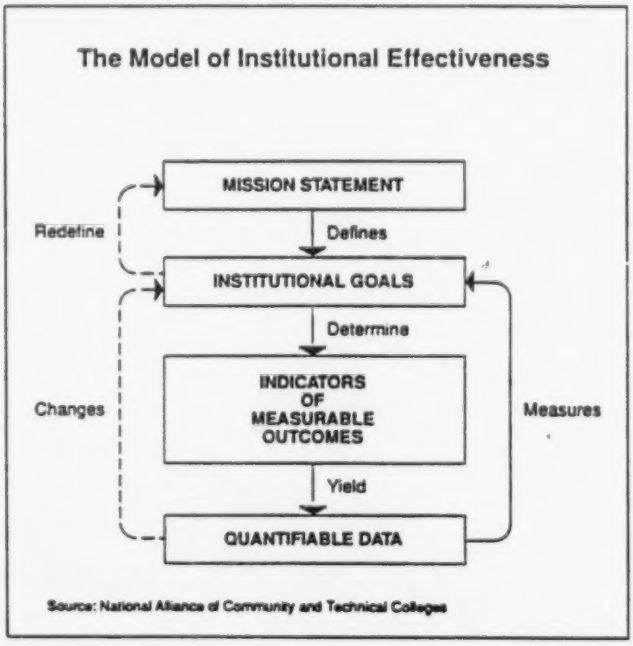
The HOW of Institutional Effectiveness

Accreditation criteria and state mandates allow considerable flexibility in how an institution organizes and implements a program of institutional

effectiveness. In the October 1990 edition of Change Magazine, Russell Edgerton outlined the broad scope of the assessment process when he observed, "It's a mindset that asks questions -- good questions, hard questions, legitimate questions -- about what and how much our students are learning."[7] For most colleges it involves asking and answering three basic questions.

1. What is the mission (business) of our college?
2. What are the major results we expect from the achievement of the mission?
3. What specific evidence are we willing to accept that these results have been achieved?

The following model of institutional effectiveness developed by the National Alliance of Community and Technical Colleges outlines the basic components of an institutional effectiveness program.



While the process for developing or operationalizing institutional effectiveness varies, it normally contains seven basic steps.

1. Articulate the mission
2. Establish a planning mechanism
3. Develop an evaluation system that tells if "the college is doing what it says it does"
4. Identify critical areas of success
5. Establish priority standards upon which the college can judge its effectiveness in the identified critical areas
6. Determine mechanisms for documenting if the established standards have been met.
   - Hard data (enrollment reports, licensure test results, transfer grades, assessment of majors, etc.)
   - Surveys (written, telephone, interviews)
   - Peer reviews
7. Utilize results of assessment for decision making

In addition to these basic organizational steps, a college must consider the following related issues:

1. Support of the president and board of trustees
2. Linkage of assessment to the college mission
3. Involvement of all units of the college
4. Emphasis on quality throughout the college, with assessment viewed as supporting quality decisions
5. Establishment of an organizational structure to monitor and report on effectiveness outcomes
6. Determination of how to pay for assessment activities

A basic element of an institutional effectiveness program is the establishment of indicators of effectiveness -- data that document that the college has achieved his mission and goals and that there are identifiable key factors that must go right if the organization is to achieve its mission. The Sloan School of Business of MIT developed an evaluation process for business and industry call Critical Success Factors (CSF). The CSF process suggests that everything a business does is not of equal value. A business should determine the activities most critical to its success and focus emphasis and resources on the critical areas."

This process of focusing on mission-related issues can be applied to educational institutions. DeAnza College in California and Midlands Technical College in South Carolina have adapted the Critical Success Factors model at the college level and the North Carolina Board of Community Colleges has applied the concept at the system level. For example, Midlands Technical College has identified six critical success factors and twenty indicators of effectiveness.

Institutional effectiveness measures utilized by colleges might include:

* success of transfer students at senior institutions
* placement rates of graduates
* satisfaction of employers
* satisfaction of students with programs and services
* impact of the institution on economic development

When these data are presented to constituents, governing boards and funding agencies, they have generally led to an enhanced reputation of the effectiveness of the two-year community college.

Perhaps more important than identifying the indicators of effectiveness and gathering data to demonstrate the achievement of the college's educational

goals is how institutions, their governing boards and governmental agencies use these data. Philip B. Crosby in his book Quality is Free observed, "It isn't what you find, it's what you do with what you find."[9] To gain college-wide support of institutional effectiveness and to enhance the work climate of the institution, institutional effectiveness data must first be used for celebration -- then for correction. Kouzes and Posner in their book The Leadership Challenge argue "Cheerleading is a large part of the leader's function. Leaders are always on the lookout for people who are doing the right thing and in the right way so they can celebrate victory."[10]

Most colleges that have had extended experience with institutional effectiveness are pleased that the findings generally demonstrate educational results that bring commendation to the institution. The institution should look for ways to recognize individuals and departments that make significant contribution toward the achievement of the college's mission. However, when data demonstrates excessive cost, undesirable outcomes and lack of correlation between resources and college mission, college leaders must be courageous enough to act. Otherwise, the planning and evaluation process will lack credibility.

Admittedly, institutional effectiveness is a time consuming and costly enterprise. In spite of the considerable investment of personnel and resources required of most institutions, the choice is no longer optional. Therefore, institutions should initiate a structured program of institutional effectiveness at the earliest possible time and look for practical outcomes which include:

- Clarification of mission
- Improved use of resources
- Identification of priorities
- Improved performance

- Increased return on resources invested
- Enhanced reputation
- Energized work environment

In addition to these practical applications, institutional effectiveness should be a catalyst for institutional renewal. Dr. Albert L. Lorenzo, President of Macomb Community College, has written extensively on the parallels between organizational development theory and the application of institutional effectiveness. He concludes "Effectiveness is not a measurement process, it's a change process."[11] He describes the well-known life cycle theory of any organization that includes birth, a period of energetic and phenomenal growth, and maturation, followed by either a decline or renewal based on the introduction of a change agent. Dr. Lorenzo argues that institutional effectiveness can be that change agent for renewing the American community college.

The Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools concludes "A self-evaluating organization has been described as an organization constantly in conflict with itself. Such tensions are worth enduring only if as a result, institutions overcome their resistance to change and provide positive incentives for faculty members and administrators alike to become involved in using evaluation results to improve programs and services."[12]

As a college initiates an effectiveness program, it should be remembered that the main purpose of evaluation is to improve the college for the benefit of its students. Community colleges should seize this opportunity to define effectiveness, and use the results to improve programs and services and celebrate our successes.

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